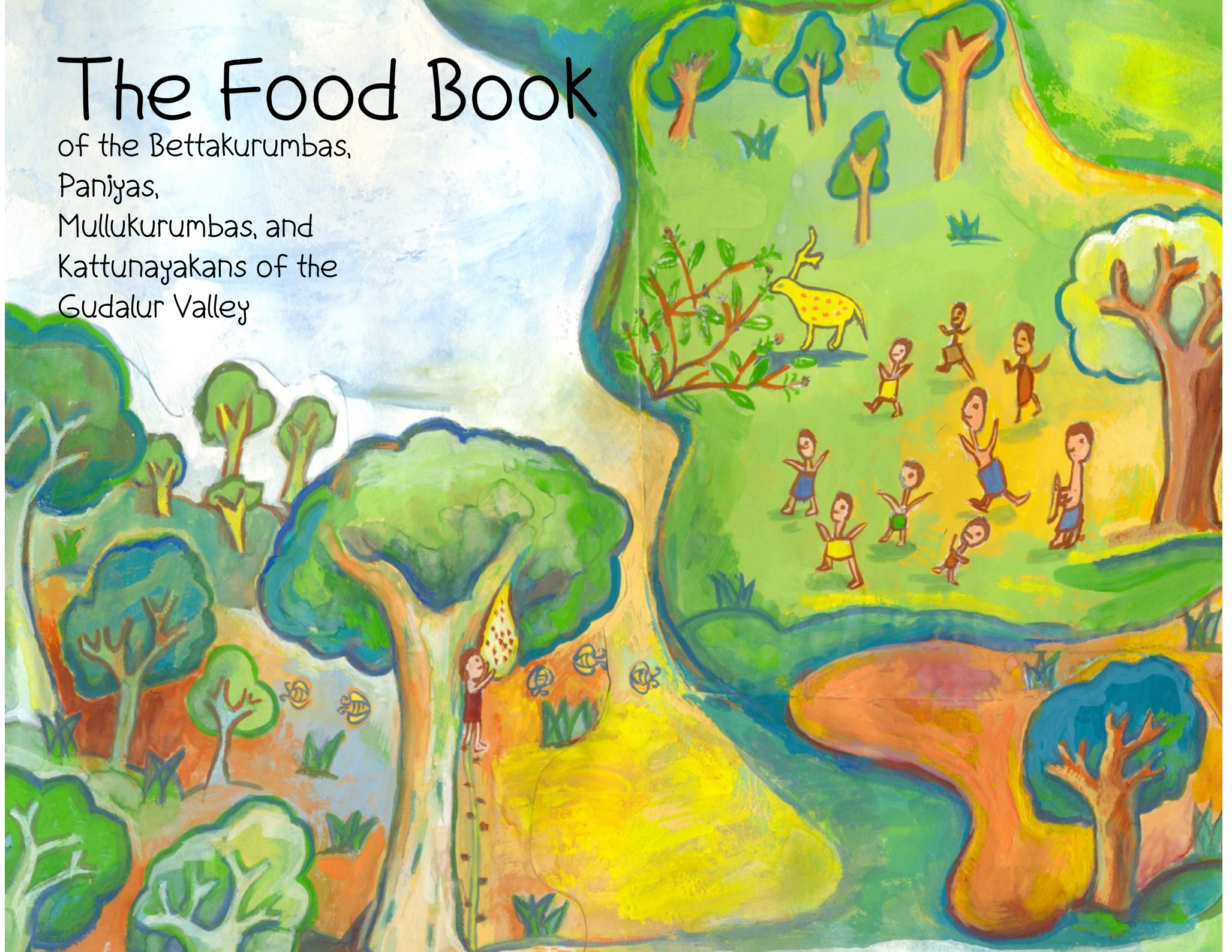


The Food Book

of the Bettakurumbas,
Paniyas,
Mullukurumbas, and
Kattunayakans of the
Gudalur Valley



Illustrated by-

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Please consult us before reproducing any part of our book

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Preface

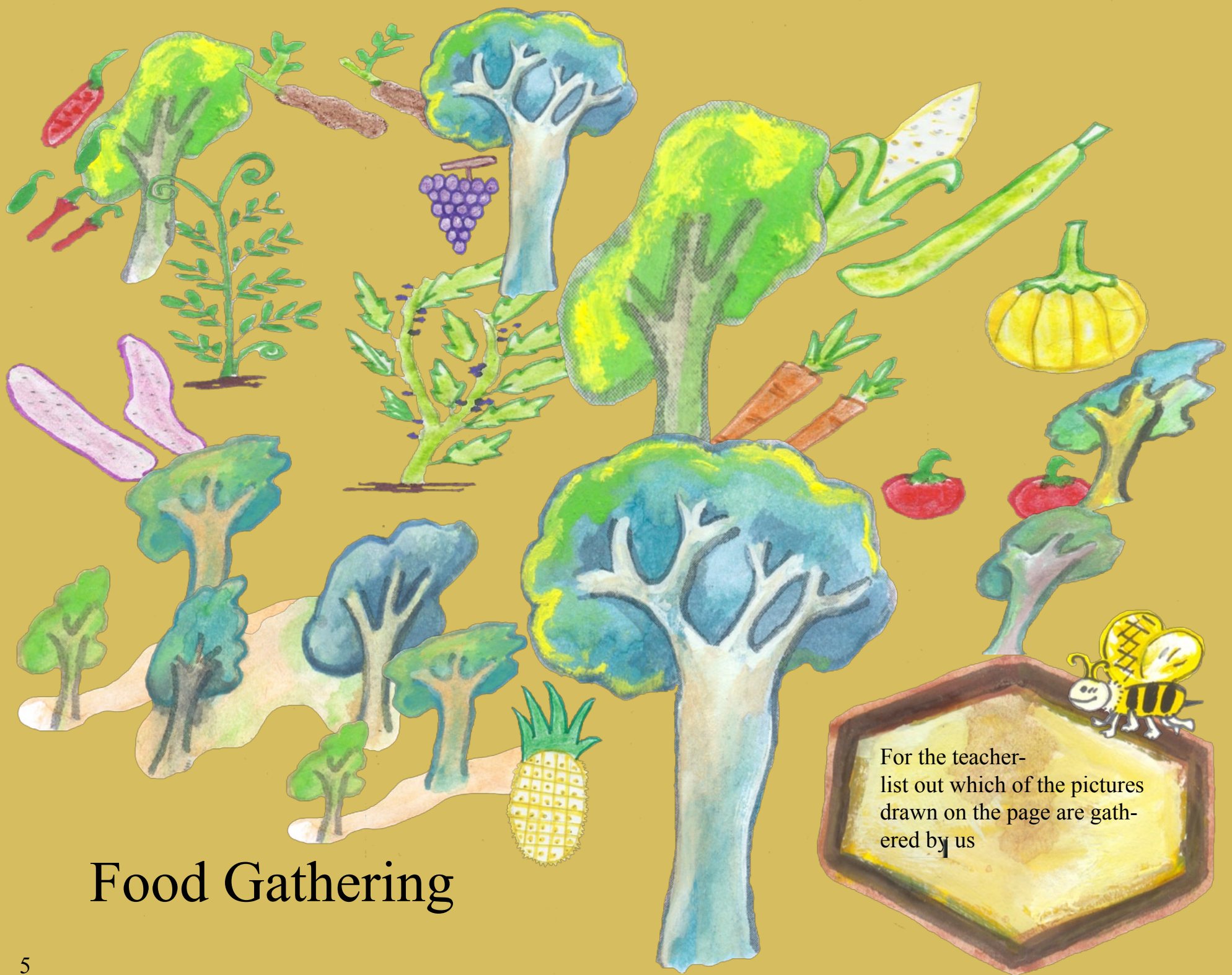
In this workbook, we have tried to capture the knowledge and practices associated with the food of the adivasis of the Gudalur Valley.

Our hunting practices, gathering food from the forest and growing our own food, all feature here. Over generations, we have developed a keen understanding of our natural habitat. Very often, our rationale or 'logic of life' are submerged by more dominant community ideals, culture and practices. Our centuries old traditions of balancing human life, of co-existing with nature, living harmoniously and sustainably with plants and animals, and our rituals around sharing food and resources, all maintain a deep sense of community and belonging.

Among us the Mullukurumbas are known for their hunting skills, while the Kattunayakans pride themselves as honey and tuber gatherers. For generations the landless Paniyas and Bettakurumbas have been food gatherers as well as cultivators on land owned by the local Chettis. This workbook is a collection of knowledge, rituals and practices of these tribes.

In the following sections we have tried to capture not just our practices around food, but also the underlying values that shape them.





Food Gathering

For the teacher-
list out which of the pictures
drawn on the page are gath-
ered by us

Elders in our communities are experts on where good food is available in the forest. Food gathering begins with a prayer in which we thank the Gods in the forest for more produce in the years to come. Elders in the group always make the first cut with the knife. They cut in a way which allows for the plant to grow (regeneration) in the next season. They also close up any pits dug to take out tubers, with the same mud. Fruits and vegetables are plucked very carefully and unripe ones are left on the tree.

However, these days, because of forest rules, people are being forced into breaking entire branches in a hurry, to avoid getting caught. Many of our traditional adivasi rituals cannot be followed because of recent difficulties in accessing our ancestral lands. Has this happened in your village? Discuss in your class.

For the teacher

1. Discuss the difference between sustainable consumption and over consumption.
2. A group plucked 45 bananas and 15 berries. There are 5 families in the village. How much will each family get?



Gathering Tubers

Tubers form an important part of adivasi food.

"Tubers are parts of the root or stem that the plant uses to store nutrients. They grow under the ground".

Before taking it out, we perform a small prayer to ward off snakes in the ground as well as to ensure greater prosperity in the years to come.

The Haarai is a spear like instrument used to dig out tubers. The mud that is taken out is always put back after taking the tuber out. Tubers often go down 6-10 feet into the ground.



Some of the tubers available in our forests are...

Noorai- It is sweet tasting and is available from March to May. Touching this tuber can make your hands itch.

Hekku- This tuber tastes similar to potatoes.

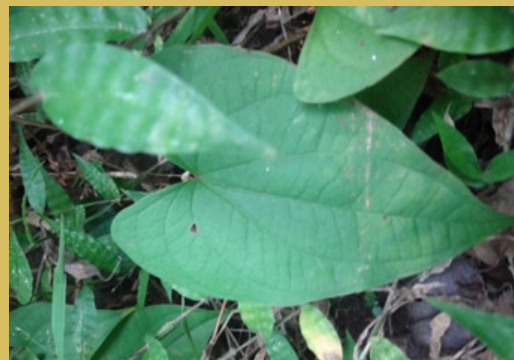
Binni- The skin of this tuber is tough and thick

Kavaley- This tuber is very big in size. Its leaves look similar to betel leaves. Its stem is slender and twirl around each other.

Naara- This tuber is considered good for indigestion. It remains fibrous even when it is cooked and one has to spit out the fibre after chewing out all the juices.



Leaf of Noorai plant



Leaf of Hekku Plant



Leaf of Naara Plant

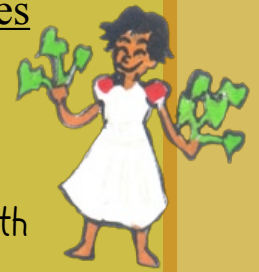
Green Leaves

Minigil, Ganake Soppu, Surne Soppu, Hett Keerai Soppu, Mullu Keerai Soppu, Taave Soppu, Ouaegandan Soppu, Tagate Soppu, Beli Kumbala Soppu, Tonch Soppu are some of the Kattunayakan names of leaves found inside the forest.



Recipe to cook green leaves

Boil leaves along with split chillies, mustard seeds and chopped onions or cook with pulses.



Ganake Soppu



Ouaegandan Soppu



Beli Kumbalam Soppu



Minigil Soppu








For the teacher-

In groups, write one adjective to describe the taste of each of these green leaves. Find out names of green leaves in the other three adivasi languages.

Fruits and Berries

Fruits and berries also add to the variety of foods available in the forest. Each season brings with it the excitement of a new fruit.

Tamil Names	 Nellikai		 Mampazham		 Athi Pazham
English Names		Jackfruit 		Banana 	



For the teacher-
Try matching the Tamil names with the English ones for the fruits in the boxes above. Find out which season these fruits are ready to eat in.

Honey Gathering

Among us, the Kattunayakans are known as traditional honey gatherers. Over generations we have become experts in the art of extracting honey from hives in the forest. We use different tools to climb trees and tap honey like ladders and ropes made out of materials found inside the forest. We use ropes peeled off the bark of the valli or keri tree and a ladder is made out of bamboo to climb trees that are often over 30ft tall. With a smoker which we call the hode, made out of partially dry twigs and leaves, we smoke out the bees from the hive before cutting it and bringing it down in a tin. Before we climb a tree to tap honey we always pray to the Muttapan gods and ask for the blessings of our ancestors. Bees are considered sacred and we pray so there are many more sweet hives in the years to come.

For the teacher-
Make a list of the tools used to gather honey. What are they made of and why are they used?
From your home, bring the tools to show the class.

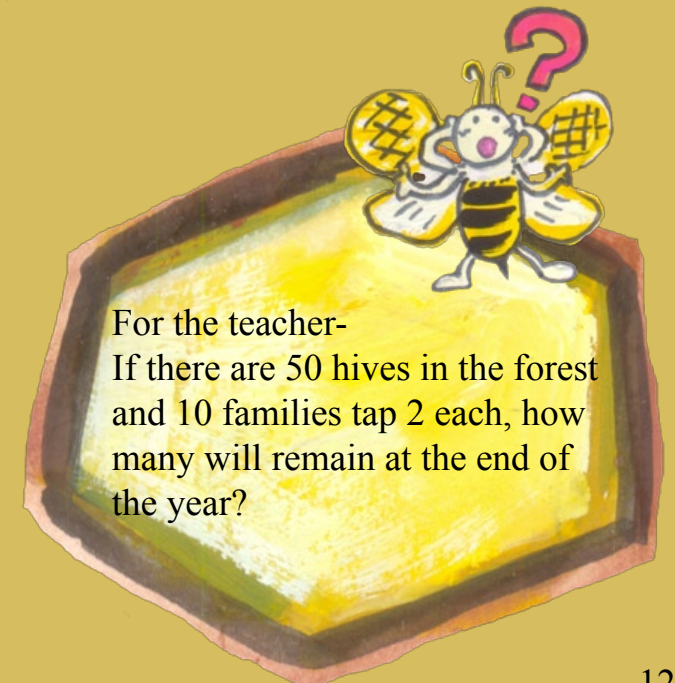


We Kattunayakans find the sweetness of honey irresistible.

During the honey season we savour and eat parts of the hive and the honey in various different recipes.

We even eat a special omelette made out of some of the larvae in the hive.

We also give honey to new born babies affected by asthma and rub it on burnt skin to help it heal. Infact we believe that the larva is much more nutritious than the honey itself.



For the teacher-
If there are 50 hives in the forest
and 10 families tap 2 each, how
many will remain at the end of
the year?

?

Long ago, deep inside the thick jungle,
there once was a queen bee.

As she wandered around the forest looking for a
strong branch to build her home, she found a tall tree.
As soon as she spotted it, she thought to herself
'Ah! That will be my home'.

So she asked the tree, 'oh, mighty tree, is your branch
strong enough to hold my children and our home?'

The tree replied, 'Of course, I would be happy
to offer my branches for you to build your home'.



For the teacher-
Questions on comprehension
Why did the queen bee ask the
tree for permission to build
her home?
Think of a title for the story.

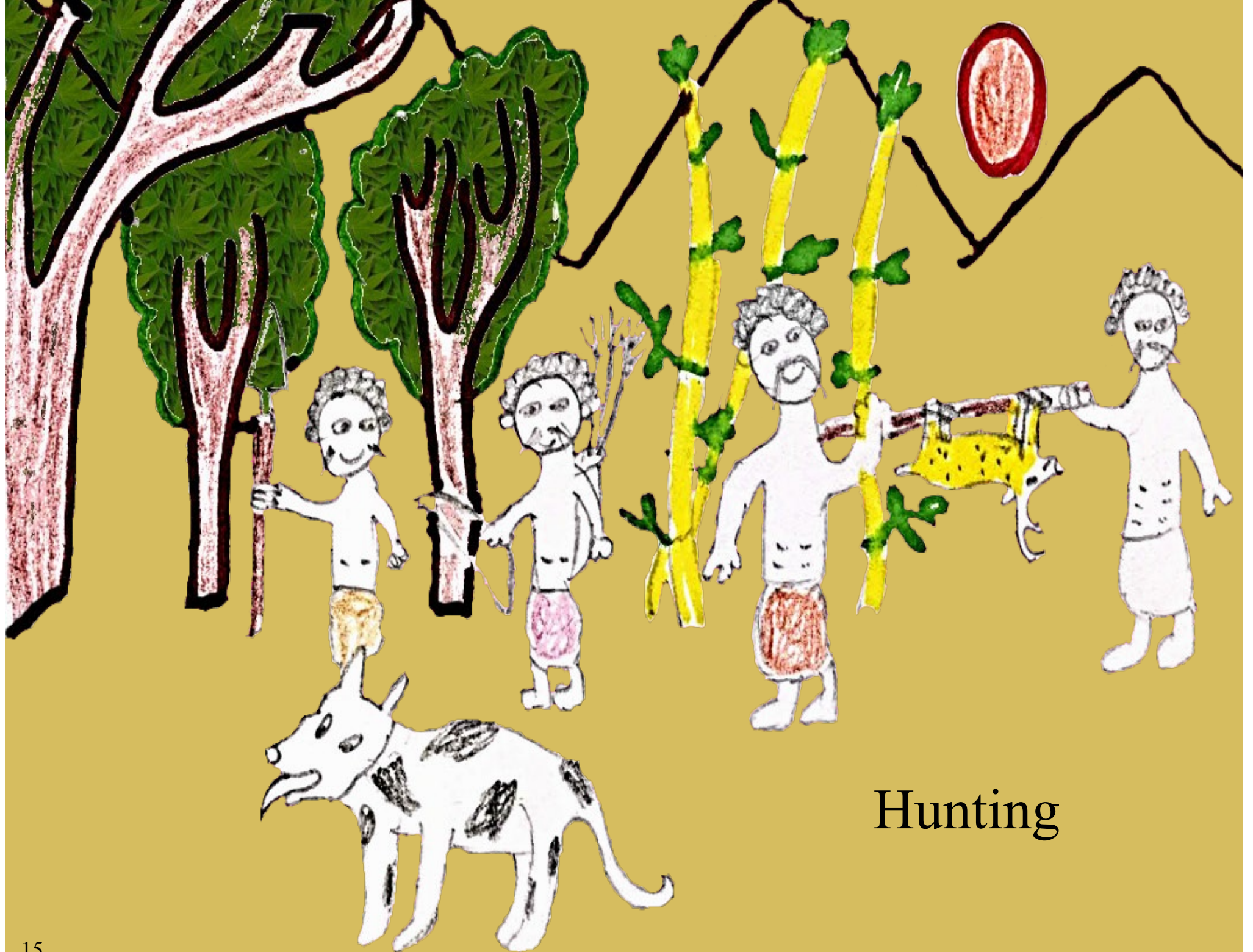


However, the queen bee knew, that if she built her home on the branch a Kattunayakan would surely climb the tree to tap honey from her home, and so the queen bee asked the tree ' I know the Kattunayakans cannot resist my honey, so will you be able to hold the weight of an adivasi when he climbs your branches? I can only build my home if you agree'. The tree agreed. Since then, legend has it that a Kattunayakan has never fallen off a tree while climbing it to get honey.



For the teacher-
Comprehension Exercise-

Why has a Kattunayakan
never fallen off a tree?
What is a bee's home called?



Hunting

All of us hunt at least some of our food. However the Mullukurumbas are famous for their hunting skills. Hunts mostly happen in groups of 20-30 men; usually one person from every family in the hamlet participates. Sometimes hamlets come together to go for a hunt. A dog always accompanies the group. The elders in the village have to grant permission before anyone heads out for a hunt. The Karniwar in turn asks for permission for the hunt from the ancestors of the community. Among the Paniyas, the prayers are offered to Nayatta Kullen or the Malaipura Muttapan. There are marked territories within which each village hunts.

Traditionally hunters wouldn't wear too much clothing. We would only cover the lower part of our body with some old loin cloth. However, hunting isn't possible in the way it used to be, there are restrictions by the forest department on entering forest lands and hunting for wild animals.



For the teacher
Why do hunters dress the
way they do? Discuss

(So they are comfortable,
camouflage, closer to
nature.)

The Paniyas have six types of hunts.

(1) Mani Nayatta- We tie a bell to a long stick and carry a torch (pantham). A man walks in front of the hunting party ringing the bell. The animal comes out of its hiding upon hearing the sound and is then hunted.

(2) Kora Nayatta- We beat small sticks together to make noise. The animals run out of the bushes out of fear and is then hunted.

(3) Wali Nayatta- two or three villagers go on a hunt together.

(4) Eravu Nayatta- We hunt animals in the night with guns (borrowed from the Chettis) and bow and arrows.

(5) Paravai Nayatta- Birds are hunted at night using bows and arrows. We take fire for light all the way. Apart from this small sticks are dipped in gum and put on the branches of fruit trees. When birds come to eat, they get stuck on the stick, fall from the tree and we catch them.

(6) Olikatti Nayatta- Big animals are hunted during the day using bows and arrows, knives and spears.

For the teacher-

Find a person who has been on one of these hunts. Invite him to your class, or ask him about the experience and share with your class. Write a paragraph on what you heard.

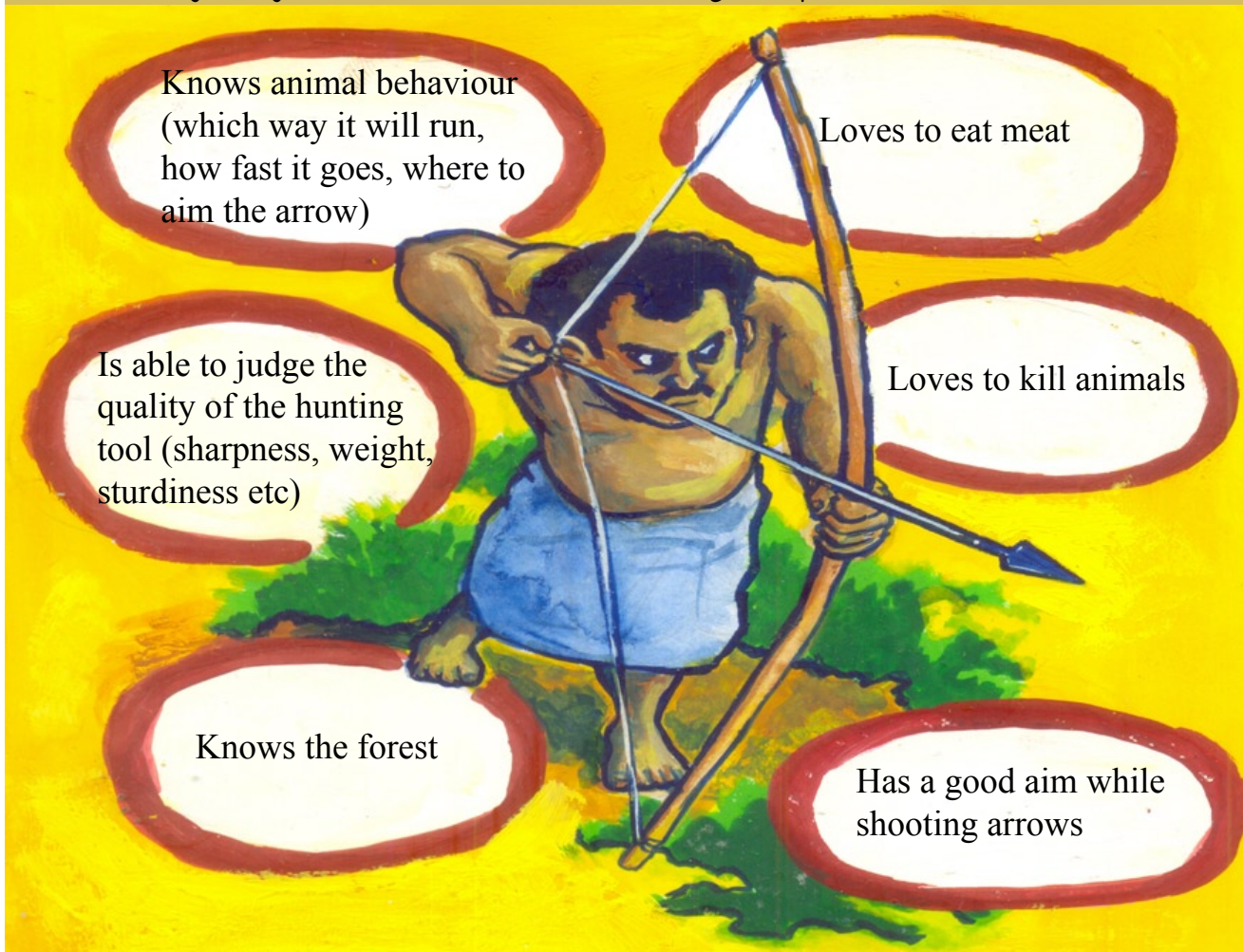


The Mullukurumbas have three types of hunts

(1) Villinayatta- When the Karnivar calls for a hunt.

(2) Vallanayatta- When the prey has already been spotted and a group is gathered to hunt it.

(3) Moyalnayatta - A hunt for a wedding or special occasion or for recreation.





What is hunted?



The following are hunted.

Rabbits, Wild Boars, Sambar Deer, Spotted Deer, Mouse Deer, Barking Deer, Porcupines, Tortoises, Birds- parrots, doves, sparrows...

Fish- Paral, Kumblam potti, Koima, Todan, Aaral, Kodali, Konjan, Kellapotan, Vaalaa, Moyil, Kadaga, Malani, Kanni Meen, Moollan are the Mullukurumba names of some of the fish we catch.

Can you find names in the other adivasi languages?

Crab- Karinanda, Kundinande are the Mullukurumba names of the crabs we catch.

What not to hunt

Animals that belong to the cat family

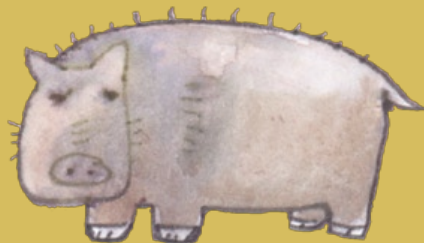
Birds that belong to the Eagle family

Domesticated animals

Animals that are pregnant

Animals that are drinking water




Young animals



For the teacher-
Discuss why these rules apply.
What is the underlying value
system represented through
these rules?



When to Hunt- Our Adivasi Calendar

DHANU	MAGARAM 	KUMBAM	MEENAM
Hunting begins	Hunting continues Ucchar Festival	Hunting ends	Honey collection begins
MEDAN	EDAVAN	MITHUNAM	KARKIDAGAM
Honey collection continues	Honey collection continues	Honey collection continues	Honey collection ends Bird hunting begins
CHINGAM	KANNI	THULAM 	VRICHIGAM 
Bird hunting continues	Bird hunting continues	Putheri Festival Bird hunting ends	Mandilam Festival

*Hunting seasons depend on many things When birds are laying eggs, and they have less food around they are not hunted. Also, during this time the spirits of the ancestors are not around to protect us. However the situation is just the opposite during the hunting season.



For the teacher-
Find out how the adivasi calendar corresponds to the Roman Calendar.
Why is hunting possible during the hunting season?
Discuss.

Hunting Festivals

'Uchchar Festival'

Uchchar celebrates the practice of hunting among the Mullukurumbas. During the festival, our young boys are initiated into hunting. From this day onwards we are trained in the art of hunting.

For the training, we roll a round piece of wood and train young boys to shoot it with the bow and arrow. Often a coconut or stone is rolled on the ground instead of the round piece of wood. This is done from when a boy is 3 or 4 years old.

However, these days the ritual has become merely symbolic.

Vows are taken on Uchchar day, we put money in our devapara to signal that we have started our prayers.



Hunting tools

Here are some of the tools used to hunt.



Ambu Villu- bow and arrow



Mottu Villu - flat/rounded arrow,
used to kill a rabbit



Kundam- It is a spear, mostly used for self defense, usually to attack a tiger. It is made out of rosewood and iron.



Valaa- It is a net, made from the bark of the kevilu tree, used to catch rabbits.



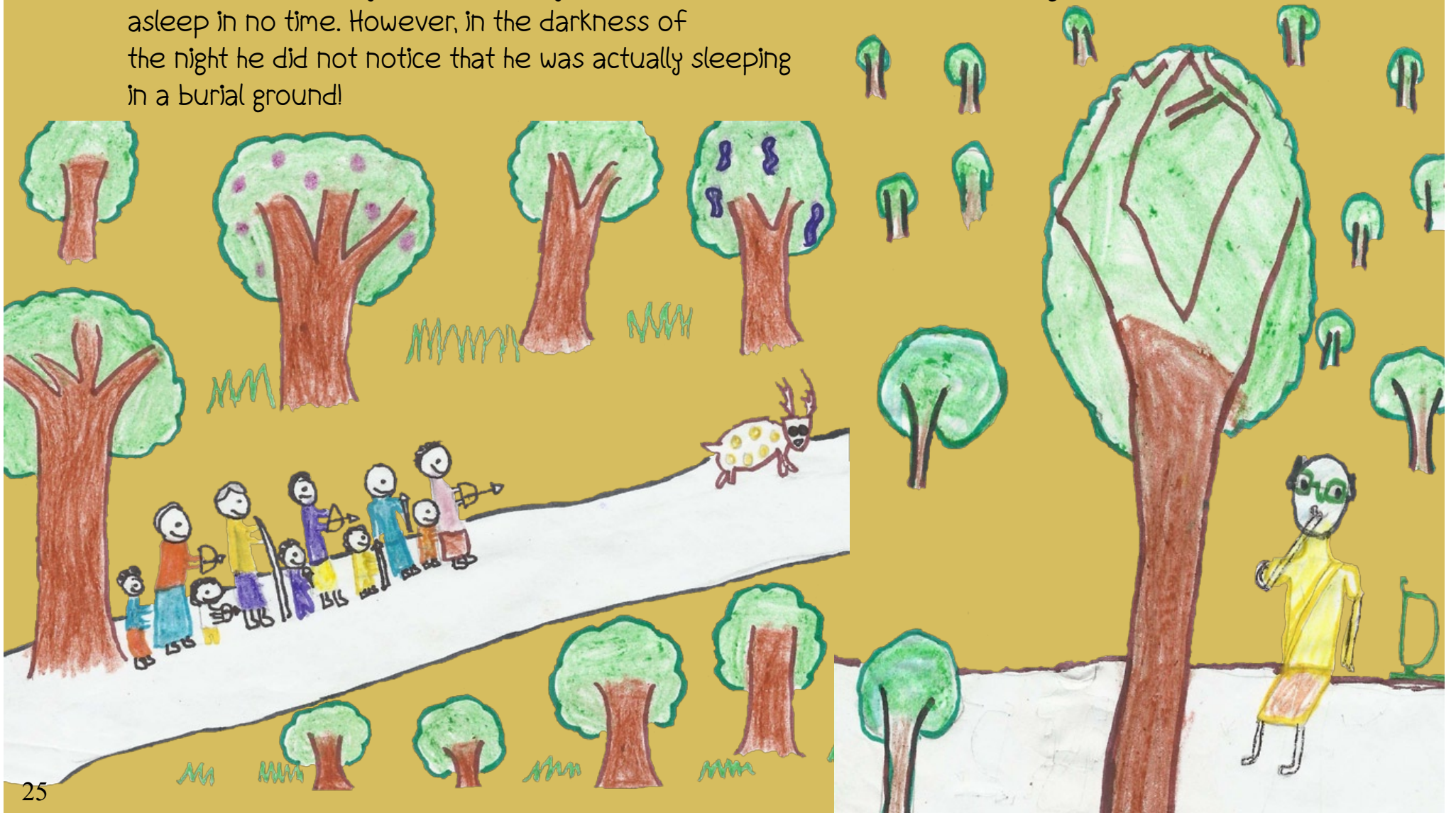
Veravillu- special type of catapult



Vellanji Kol- Sticky stick used as a bird trap. A natural gum is made from the milk (latex) of the Aainee, Atti or Chela tree. This latex is mixed together, along with milk from a Jackfruit and heated. Once the water evaporates sesame oil is poured into the mixture and heated once again, this keeps the gum sticky even when it rains. The gum is applied on a small stick and placed on the branch of a tree to trap birds.

Kothan's Curse A Mullukurumba Tale

Long long ago a group of Mullukurumba men set out on a hunt deep inside the forest. Among them was an old man, Kothan Muthappan. As night fell, Kothan found that he had lost his way. He decided to spend the night in the forest and look for the others at the break of dawn. He found a tree, placed his bow and arrow by his side and lay down under it. Tired from all the walking Kothan was fast asleep in no time. However, in the darkness of the night he did not notice that he was actually sleeping in a burial ground!



Suddenly a strange creature appeared in the distance. It came closer and closer to Kothan who was asleep. Immediately Kothan's arrow began to shake vigorously, making a loud buzzing noise. He jerked himself up and immediately the creature ran away. Kothan was dazed and relieved that he was safe.

After the episode, he was unable to sleep. He took a betel leaf from his pouch and opened his box of chunnambu to spread on the leaf. He looked around for a twig to scoop out the chunnamba but couldn't find anything. He spotted his arrow and used the pointed end to spread it evenly on the leaf. He left the stained arrow by his side, and after chewing the betel leaf for a while fell back into a deep slumber.

A few hours later, the strange creature reappeared, but this time the arrow did not warn the Muthappan. It lay there stained and uncared for, while the creature took Kothan's life. Since he had not cared for his tool, it did not protect him.

Since then Mullukurumbas have taken special care of their tools.



For the teacher-
Find out the meaning of vigorous,
dawn, burial ground, dazed, episode,
scoop, deep slumber and jerked

How is meat carried back home?

If the animal is big, we cut it into smaller pieces and put it into sacks.
Or else we tie its forelegs and hindlegs to a stick which we carry back home.

How is the meat shared?

Every family in the village gets a share of the meat.
Those who participated in the hunt get an extra share or a juicier portion of the kill.
In a village with 6 families this is how the meat will be shared.



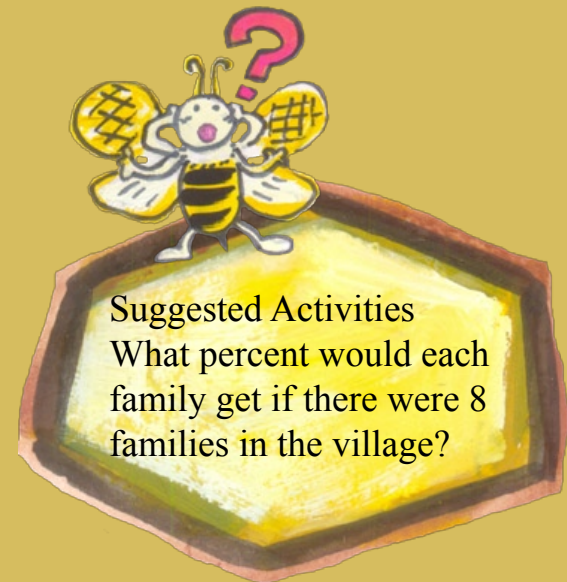
60% for families in the village

10% to the hunter

10% to the person who picks up
the animal after the arrow hits it

10% to the person who brings
the dog to make the animal run

10% to the karniwar



Suggested Activities

What percent would each
family get if there were 8
families in the village?

To celebrate the hunt, the head of the animal is kept on display. Everyone brings ingredients. A common curry is cooked. Sometimes hunted meat is cut into small pieces and strung together on a stick and smoke dried over the fire. They are then washed, salted, spiced, ground (pounded) or fried and eaten.

Mullukurumba Rabbit Curry Recipe

Grind pepper, coriander, turmeric, garlic and onion into a paste. Boil the paste with the meat till it is cooked. Add salt to taste. The curry is ready to eat!



Fishing

Men, women and children all go fishing. Often they fish in the river, but during the monsoon they also go fishing in the wetlands. Sometimes a locally made substance is used to make the fish unconscious for a while (it acts as an anesthetic) to catch it. Among us, the Bettakurumbas use the leaves of the Nanjenkai tree to make a paste which is mixed in water. Similarly when Seevakai Pattai are dipped in water they create foam making the fish confused and easy to catch.

We Paniyas also go fishing at night, when the water level rises and there are more fish in the river.



Suggested Activities - Discuss
what anesthetic means?
Where else is it used?

Tools used to catch fish

We use a thread from a palm tree attached to a bamboo fishing rod with a hook and worm to catch fish.

Among us, women often go out fishing. We take with us a Kortha and Chaada (bamboo baskets) to catch fish. After the fish are caught we store them in a Meenkoota (another type of bamboo basket).



Grab a crab

"During the holidays I visit Devala to see my grandparents. We often go to catch crabs in the nearby river. They taste delicious when eaten with rice! The black crabs are always found in the river. The brownish red and bluish white ones mostly live in paddy fields, while the white ones crawl into holes in the ground. There are many more varieties of crabs in the Sea, which we buy in shops in the market.

Catching crabs takes many hours. Very often children and young people go out to catch them. We spend all day collecting them and take them home to eat for dinner. When adults go in groups they catch crabs while finishing other work like washing clothes or collecting firewood.



Catching crabs is not an easy business. To make sure a crab is in a hole, there must be fresh mud all around it. If the hole is covered with the fresh mud, it is a sign that two crabs live in it. To take the crab out we dig all around the hole to make it bigger. After this comes the dangerous part. We put our hand into the hole and grab the crab. Immediately it clutches the hand with its sharp claws. At this point it is important to stay still. The crab will gently release its grip allowing us to pull it out.

Often several holes are connected to each other, making it trickier. Here, we find a long blade of thick grass and tie it into a knot which tightens when pulled. We then sink the looped end into the hole and shake it vigorously. The crab will immediately hold onto the grass with its claw and just as it does so, we swiftly pull it out. Sometimes the crab lets go, or cuts off the grass with its claw before we pull it out. It requires great skill to get this right."

As told by Praveen and Sudirajan



Cultivation



Cultivation

Traditionally our communities did not cultivate land. However, as time went by this changed. Among us, the Paniyas worked as bonded labourers on land owned by the Chettis. The Bettakurumbas too worked as labourers along with being shifting cultivators of millet which they grew for their own use. Only one of our communities owned land on which they grew paddy- the Mullukurumbas.

Today, among us, only the Mullukurumbas continue to cultivate paddy on their lands while the rest of us grow food crops like pepper, coffee, cardamom and bananas around tea plantations and the forests.



Cultivation Festivals

Putheri

Among us, Mullukurumbas and Paniyas celebrate Putheri. On this day the first paddy is harvested by the village elder, who takes it to the temple. He then gives everyone a few sheaves of paddy and we tie it to the entrance of our homes. On Putheri the new rice is cooked and a portion of it is kept away for our ancestors. Putheri is an important festival in our calendar and is celebrated in the month of Thulam.

On this day we wash and clean all our hunting tools. A dish in the afternoon meal among us Mullukurumbas is called the 'Puthen Kalakuthal'. Coconut and jaggery are mixed together and the Karniwar distributes a few sheaves of paddy to each house. The husk is removed from the paddy and each grain of rice is added to the coconut jaggery mixture. Every member of the family is served a portion of this delicious dish.



Kambalamkuthu

Among us, the Paniyas celebrate Kambalamkuthu when the work of transplanting paddy is carried out. At night we get together and work in fields, accompanied by a lot of music and dancing. The music and celebration continue through the night as the work is carried out. The village elder welcomes everyone by giving them a betel leaf. Then, when the transplanting work begins, it is believed that the goddess Muthachi comes to the field, does a dance, and leaves. The elders who come for the Kambalamkuthu celebration bring their thudi (flute) and cheenam (drum). As soon as they start playing the music, the men and women start dancing and do their planting work. By the morning the work is complete!

In the older days, people who came for work on that day got rice or 5 measures of paddy. We enjoy working on this day while the music plays through the night...



Traditional Healing

In all our communities we have learned elders who are traditional healers. Both men and women practice the art of healing. Our treatments include eating or drinking substances made from herbs and leaves found in our forests, as well as performing rituals to get rid of bad omens and pleasing our ancestors. Often traditional healers even treat non-tribals.

Our traditional knowledge includes treatments for diseases like asthma, injuries, fevers, bone fractures, headaches, stomach aches, body pains, throat aches, mouth ulcers, neck boils and even jaundice. On the following page is a small list of ailments and their cures.



Ailment

Cure

Head Aches

Grind basil and rub the paste on your forehead.

Cough and Colds

Eat a few big drops of honey or drink an infusion of pepper and dried ginger mixed in hot water.

Burns

Rub chicken fat on the burn.

Body Ache

Drink or rub the juice of bitter gourd on the area.

Scabies

Apply pig fat on the affected area.

Injuries

Soak a cloth in monitor lizard blood and tie around the affected area.

Cracked Skin

Apply fish fat on the affected area.

To become strong!

Tie elephant hair around your waist.

